

PERSONAL

SHORTER HOURS

An Important Public Question.

DEAR SIR,—

Your attention is respectfully called to a resolution of which notice has been given, and which will soon be discussed in the City Council. Though simple in form, this resolution involves an important principle that to some extent affects every citizen. It is in the following terms :

" That the City Engineer and the City Solicitor be instructed to have inserted in every contract for the construction of public works, a clause providing that no person employed in such construction shall be compelled or permitted to work more than nine hours per day, except in case of emergency, and then only by permission of the City Engineer, given in writing, every such case of permission to be reported by the City Engineer to the City Council."

The arguments herein submitted in favor of this resolution are not new. They are, however, very strong. They have led to a movement—now general throughout the civilized world—to secure a shortening of the hours of labor. This movement commends itself to the judgment and conscience of all thoughtful and right purposed people who give it careful consideration. It is daily growing in strength and public favor. It would be aided by the adoption of the resolution above set out. Its success would be advantageous to every section of the community. You are requested to kindly consider the following statement of some of the benefits that it would confer.

The Unemployed.

If the hours of labor in a day are shortened there will, of course, be more days' work to do. There will be more steady employment and more spare time for the employed, both of which conditions will be exceedingly beneficial. Men who work only part of the year will work during more days, or else more men will be employed. In either case there will be a lessening of the number of the unemployed.

Hours and Wages.

If the unemployed are fewer, wages will be better. One reason for low wages is keen competition. The competitor of the man who has a job is the man who is out of a job. If there be 9,000 hours' work to be done to-day, and 1,000 men to do it, there is work for all at nine hours each. But if the employers say every man must work ten hours, there is only work for 900 men, and the other 100 are idling round wanting a job, some of them, perhaps, willing to take anything they can get rather than starve or have their families starve. The men who are working are obliged to take less pay, because the idle men are ready to work for less. Thus the long working day means fewer men working and more men idle, and the presence of unemployed men always tends to keep down the wages of the men that are employed. This is one reason why some unprincipled employers fight against shorter hours.

The Standard of Living.

Shortening the hours of labor further tends, indirectly but effectively, to increase wages by raising the general standard of living for those who work. This fact is deserving of special consideration. One reason why the wages of laborers are higher here than in, say China, is

that the white standard of living is higher than the Chinese standard. Civilized men must have certain conditions of food, clothing, housing and other requirements. They must have what they call the necessities of life. These are not merely the things required to keep men alive, but things which they have been trained to desire so strongly that they will not do without them. A white man could live without soap, or sugar, or newspapers, but he won't. Ten white men could live in one room, but they won't. They have a higher standard. Chinese laborers have not. Therefore white men will not work for Chinese wages. They simply refuse to do it. That is why they are paid higher wages than Chinamen. It is certain that if they would accept less they would be paid less.

Men demand and employers give, wages which really depend upon the standard of living that we insist upon as necessary. Therefore it follows that what will raise the standard of living will raise wages.

What Determines the Standard.

Now the standard of living depends to a great extent upon the hours a man works, or rather upon the time he has to spare. If a man has spare time and has steady employment, he uses or enjoys in his spare time what he earns in his working time. If he works, say fourteen hours a day, he must practically go from work to bed and from bed to work. He has no time to live, to grow, to be a man. If you shorten his hours of work he has time to dress himself and go out. He must have better clothes. He has time to read. He must have papers and books. He has time to look at his children, to learn their wants, to take an interest in his home. He wants a better home. He wants his family better cared for. He *needs* more than before. His standard of living goes up.

Men in this position will refuse to work unless paid the wages that will keep up the higher standard. Wages must rise when the standard rises.

The Employer's Share.

How will the workers' higher standard affect the employer? Will the better wages benefit the men who pay them? Yes. Inevitably. It is admitted that higher wages means better markets. The men who pay the wages are the men who build the houses, and own the railways, and import the teas, and manufacture the books, that the earners use. They garner profits on all the goods that the higher standard demands. When you raise the standard of living you make a market for food and clothing and furniture and houses and everything else that the higher standard affects.

If men have more spare time and are getting more money, they will buy more books, and more pianos, and more music. Business will boom. The worker with shorter hours has time to be social. He visits his friends. They visit him. He lights up his house to entertain them. He must have a better house. He rides on the street cars. He takes his family to the Island. There will be more street cars needed, and more excursion boats, and more letter carriers, and more bicycles. There will be more industry and more commerce and more prosperity. Civilization means progress.

Idle Time and Spare Time.

Kindly bear in mind the difference between idle time and spare time. An unemployed man is not earning. He cannot spend. His time is taken up seeking work and worrying because he cannot get it.

He does not enjoy life, and find comfort in society, and buy furniture, and make business boom. All the advantages that come from spare time, come from the spare time of the man that works, and not from the idleness of the man that is out of work. Now, shorter hours will lessen the number of idle men, while it increases the amount of spare time, and, as was said before, tends to raise wages, and so increases the purchasing power of the worker and the welfare of all.

The Effect on the Community.

The man who has more time to talk and listen will be a better man. He has time to go to meetings. He joins a lodge, or a union. He thinks more and thinks better. He has broader ideas. He has more desires. He feels that he needs many things that he did not feel the want of before. His standard of living goes up again.

Men that have more spare time will take more interest in public affairs. We will have more brain power at work on the great problems of life. We will have more religion and better religion, and more politics and better politics, and better laws, and better aldermen, and better government, and everybody will be benefitted.

Machinery Should Help Men.

Let me mention some other reasons why the hours of, at any rate, some classes of work, should be shortened. On account of the great development of machinery it takes fewer workers than before to produce a given quantity of goods. Machinery means vastly more production by the same number of employees. You cannot continue to give work to as many persons without shortening the hours of work. What is the use of multiplying our producing power unless we take steps to increase the market for the goods produced, that is to increase the consuming power of the people. As has been shown already, a reasonable shortening of the hours of labor is one of the best ways of doing this.

It must be remembered that foreign markets are fast becoming workshops and fields. We cannot give unless we take. Production cannot continually go on expanding unless consumption increases.

The Increasing Strain.

In certain kinds of work the workers cannot stand as many hours of toil as they used to stand. The man who tends a never slackening machine in a well-equipped factory, works at a higher tension than did the man who hammered out the article to be produced on the anvil, or shaped it at the bench. The girl who tends the racing machinery in a woollen mill, has a heavier strain than had the girl who worked at the old spinning wheel or wool carders. The motorman on the car front, or the driver on the locomotive, has a vastly different job from what the teamster used to have when he sat upon his load. This growing tension ought to be accompanied with shorter hours, or the heavy strain will be too much for the men who have to stand it, and they would be far better off without the improved machinery if it brings them no advantage such as they would get from a shortening of the hours of toil.

Brain Work and Manual Work.

Men sometimes say "We work ten or twelve hours in our offices, why should not men work as long in factories?" I am not advocating long hours in the office. A good deal of what has been said about manual labor applies to office work as well. The fatigue of office work, however,

is not as great as the fatigue of physical labor. The man who toils in the factory or with the pick and shovel, has more need of rest and change than the man who works at his desk or in the court room with more mind work and therefore less of narrowing drudgery. The monotony of manual work is one of the hardest things about it. This monotony is increased by the specialization developed in highly organized methods of production. The mind is kept to one line. The muscles are kept to one kind of action. The man that works steadily making one part of a piece of furniture, has it harder than the man that used to make the whole article. He has not the "change" that rests, nor the interchange of thought that relieves. His worktime should grow shorter as the stress of his work grows harder.

The Case Summed Up.

The foregoing are a few of the facts and arguments on which is based the movement that has for its object a reasonable reduction in the hours of labor now customary, that in very many cases are excessive. The success of that movement would have the following results: (1) A lessening of the number of the unemployed. (2) An increase in the rate of wages. (3) A higher standard of living. (4) An increase in the comfort and intelligence of the people. (5) Better markets, better prices, and the stimulation of industry and commerce.

There are of course limits within which the shortening process can produce the results above set out. The object aimed at is a fairer distribution of work, so as to secure a fuller enjoyment of the products of work, and of even much more work than now goes on. While many men are overworked, to their injury and loss, and others are pleading for a chance to work, there can be no danger that harm will come through a reduction of working time from ten hours to nine or eight. On the contrary, such a change must be productive of incalculable good.

A Forward Step.

No one imagines or contends that a shortening of the hours of labor would prove a panacea for social evils. It is only one of many changes that are needed to ameliorate those evils and bring about a better condition of affairs, but it is certainly one of the most important and desirable reforms that has been proposed. The action which the City Council is asked to take will be simply a *step* in the right direction. It will only affect a comparatively small number of men. It will, however, do some good in its actual operation, and it will do a great deal of good by setting up a higher public standard, and showing that the growing intelligence of the day demands a change in the conditions of toil, along the lines that I have briefly endeavored to indicate.

You are earnestly requested to give your valued personal support to the proposal that has been made. Members of the City Council are rightly desirous of learning and considering the views of their constituents on the questions with which the Council is called to deal. Your advocacy of this reform will help to both strengthen and express public opinion in its favor.

With much respect I have the honor to be, dear sir,

Yours sincerely,

Toronto, October, 1899.

F. S. SPENCE,



52 Confederation Life Building.